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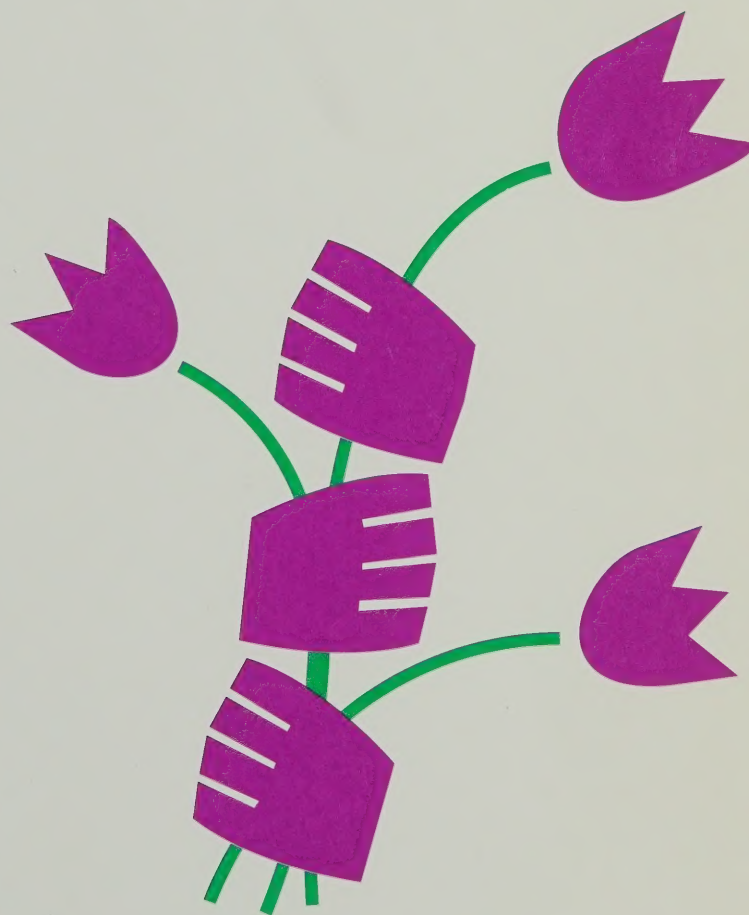


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Four Variations of Family Violence: A Review of Sociological Research

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Four Variations of Family Violence: A Review of Sociological Research

A Report Prepared for the Family Violence
Prevention Division, Health Canada

by

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Introduction

In Canada, as elsewhere, family violence is increasingly demanding the attention of both social scientists and policy makers. For example, academic and government researchers are presently developing a substantial body of knowledge on the extent, causes, distribution, and consequences of various forms of wife assault.¹ They have also demystified some injurious popular myths and stereotypes about husband-to-wife attacks. However, they have accumulated very little reliable data on other forms of family violence, such as violence against husbands, sibling abuse, parent abuse, and parental violence toward adolescents. A computer-assisted literature review completed by the author of this report reveals that much more empirical work on these subjects is warranted because so few studies have been conducted. The primary purpose of this report is to provide a brief review of both the U.S. and limited Canadian sociological literature on the extent of the above four variants of domestic violence.

Female Violence in Marital Relationships: Self-defence or Husband Abuse?

One of the most controversial issues in family violence research today is the nature of violence against husbands. This topic has generated a major debate, especially between feminists and those who are affiliated with the University of New Hampshire's Family Research Laboratory, such as Murray Straus, a "pioneer in his field" (Kittredge, 1989). In the discussion that follows, both sides of the controversy will be summarized. Before the issue of female violence in marital relationships is examined here, however, it is necessary to define the term "husband." There is a great amount of controversy over who is and who is not a husband.² For reasons described by DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991), it is difficult to differentiate between cohabiters and legally married men. Thus, for the purpose of this document, a husband is any man who is legally married or is sexually and emotionally linked to a female cohabiter.³

Homicides

According to Dobash *et al.*, (1992), homicide research is one type of evidence researchers use to support their contention that wives are as violent as husbands. For example, American sociologists, Steinmetz and Lucca assert that:

"...data on homicide between spouses suggest that an almost equal number of wives kill their husbands as husbands kill their wives (Wolfgang, 1958). Thus, it appears that men and women might have equal potential for violent marital interaction; initiate similar acts of violence; and when differences of physical strength are equalized by weapons, commit similar amounts of spousal homicide (1988: 241)."

Steinmetz and Lucca find empirical support for the above contention in Wolfgang's (1958) study which, according to some critics (e.g., Dobash *et al.*, 1992: 80),

1. See DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991), and Smith (1987, 1990) for comprehensive reviews of the Canadian sociological literature on wife assault.

2. See DeKeseredy and Hinch (1991) for a discussion on the conflicting definitions of both marital and dating relationships.
3. This is a revised version of both Ellis' (1989) definition of cohabitation and DeKeseredy and Hinch's definition of a wife.

provides a "slender basis" for their position. His homicide data collected in Philadelphia between 1948 and 1952 show that 53 men murdered their wives and 47 women killed their husbands. Further support for Steinmetz and Lucca's assertion is provided by Maxfield's (1989) more recent national U.S. study which shows that between 1976 and 1985, 10 529 wives and 7888 husbands were murdered by their spouses. These two findings translate into a 57:43 ratio of female to male victims.

There is no question that husbands are murdered almost as often as wives in the United States; even so, Steinmetz and Lucca's⁴ analysis has many major limitations. Several researchers (Campbell, 1992; Daly and Wilson, 1988; Geotting, 1989; Lundsgaarde, 1977) provide a major challenge to the argument that marital homicide is "sexually symmetrical." (Dobash *et al.*, 1992). Their findings, for example, show that:

"Men often kill wives after lengthy periods of prolonged physical violence accompanied by other forms of abuse and coercion; the roles in such cases are seldom if ever reversed. Men perpetrate familicidal massacres, killing spouse and children together; women do not. Men commonly hunt down and kill wives who have left them; women hardly ever behave similarly. Men kill wives as part of planned murder-suicides; analogous acts by women are almost unheard of. Men kill in response to revelations of wifely infidelity; women almost never respond similarly, though their mates are more often adulterous (Dobash *et al.*, 1992: 81)."

Another body of empirical work on homicide also calls Steinmetz and Lucca's analysis into question (Browne, 1987; Campbell, 1992; Daly and Wilson, 1988; Jones, 1980; Polk and Ranson, 1991; Wallace, 1986; Wilbanks, 1983). This research shows that, in sharp contrast to men, women who kill their partners do so only after years of enduring various forms of physical and sexual abuse, using up all available forms of social support, when they perceive that they cannot leave their abusive relationships, and because they fear for their lives (Dobash *et al.*, 1992).

In summary, the results of several U.S. studies reveal that homicides committed by husbands and those committed by wives are not similar in scope. Ample evidence shows that they are different in motive and meaning.

U.S. marital homicide data are not consistent with Canadian statistics. Numerical equivalence is clearly not found in this country:⁵ in 1990, 74 wives and 26 husbands were murdered by their spouses, a ratio of 3:1. Before presenting Canadian findings, it is necessary to provide a legal definition of the term "homicide." In Canada, this extreme form of violence includes three categories: murder, manslaughter, and infanticide (Johnson, 1990).

The largest percentage (39%) of Canadian homicides solved by the police between 1974 and 1987 were classified as domestic homicides, and men who killed their wives or cohabiting partners were the largest cohort of perpetrators (37%). Only 12 percent of the domestic homicides were committed by wives and common-law wives. Most of the legally married offenders used guns to kill their wives (50%); however, common-law husbands used guns (34%) and beatings (30%) in roughly equal proportions (Johnson and Chisholm, 1990). Contrary to popular belief, Canadian women are more likely to be killed by their spouses (31%) than by strangers on the street (24%) (Johnson, 1990). The major motives for these fatal attacks are anger, jealousy, revenge and quarrels (Boyd, 1988; Daly and Wilson, 1988). Men, on the other hand, are more likely to be killed by strangers (24%) than by spouses (6%).

If interpretations of marital homicide data have generated a major debate in the United States, then the same thing can be said about analyses of sublethal forms of female violence in spousal relationships.

Sublethal Female Assaults in the Marital Context

As Schwartz and DeKeseredy (in press) point out, there has never been any doubt that some wives strike their husbands with the intent to injure. In fact, that there are battered husbands should not be a subject for disagreement (Pagelow, 1985; Schwartz, 1987). The main points of contention are whether women **mainly** use violence as a means of self-defence, and whether the presence of male victims mitigates or changes the meaning of the fact that women are the overwhelmingly predominant victims of marital violence. Before these issues surfaced in the Canadian context, they were given considerable attention in the United States.

The U.S. controversy started in the late 1970s with the publication of Steinmetz's (1977-78) article in *Victimology*. Based on a secondary analysis of national

4. McNeely and Robinson-Simpson's (1987) interpretation of U.S. homicide statistics is similar to Steinmetz and Lucca's. Thus, it is equally problematic (Dobash *et al.*, 1992).

5. Sexual symmetry is also non-existent in the United Kingdom and Denmark (Wilson and Daly, 1992).

incidence data⁶ produced by the controversial and much criticized *Conflict Tactics Scale* (CTS) (Straus, 1979), Steinmetz found that more reported blows were struck by women than men. Consequently, she argued that there was strong evidence of a "battered husband syndrome." This assertion is problematic, mainly because of her interpretation of the data generated by the CTS.

The CTS is the most common measure of non-sexual family violence and dating abuse in North America (Straus and Gelles, 1990). It is a quantitative instrument which consists of 18 (sometimes slightly more) items that measure three ways of dealing with interpersonal conflict in intimate relationships: reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical violence. The items are categorized on a continuum from least to most severe, with the first 10 describing non-violent tactics and the last 8 describing violent strategies. The last 5 items, from kicked, bit, or "hit with a fist" to "used a knife or a gun" make up the severe violence scale.

The CTS used to measure spousal violence is generally introduced as follows:

"No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree on major decisions, get annoyed about something the other person does, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reasons. They also use different ways of trying to settle their differences. I'm going to read a list of some things that you and your partner might have done when you had a dispute, and would first like you to tell me for each one how often you did it in the past year (Straus *et al.*, 1981: 256)."

Although flawed and highly criticized, the representative sample survey data elicited by the CTS are probably the best available to determine the incidence and prevalence of spousal abuse in the population at large (Smith, 1987). A number of major limitations to this scale have been identified (Breines and Gordon, 1983; Dobash *et al.*, 1992; DeKeseredy and Hinch, 1991; DeKeseredy and MacLean, 1990). Perhaps most importantly, the "interspousal reliability" of the CTS has been drawn into question. Typically, the CTS is administered to one spouse or the other but not to both, with the assumption that the non-responding spouse would have given equivalent responses. Various independent studies, in which both spouses were interviewed with the CTS, demonstrate significant differences between the reports of violence offered by

husbands and wives (Dobash *et al.*, 1992). The inability of this scale to reveal the context, meaning, and motives of marital violence is discussed here because the problem is directly relevant to debates on female violence.

First, since the CTS was designed specifically to measure only the incidence and prevalence of both physically and psychologically abusive acts, it can never come close to answering the question: "Why do wives physically assault their partners?" Second, the likelihood that many men greatly underreport their violent behaviours casts doubt upon the "mutual combat" (Berk *et al.*, 1983) contention (DeKeseredy and MacLean, 1990). Browne comes to similar conclusions in her study of battered women who killed their partners:

"Thus, in a study combining estimations of violence by male perpetrators on female victims, one is faced with the possibility that the perpetrators will sound less violent and more victimized, while the victims will appear to have been less severely assaulted and more likely to victimize their partners, than is actually the case (1987: 8)."

In summary, inaccurate interpretations of CTS-based incidence data, such as Steinmetz's, provide misleading images of female violence in marital relationships.

Aware of the above limitations, Canadian researchers Brinkerhoff and Lupri urge that caution should be used when interpreting their CTS findings which show that except for "minor" forms of violence, "...the reported rates of violent acts by women against their partners exceed the rates reported by men" (1988: 418). They also maintain that women are more likely to sustain greater injuries than men, male violence causes more physical harm than female abuse, and women are more prone to be victimized in the home. Although these arguments are valid, Brinkerhoff and Lupri do not support them with empirical data. Thus, DeKeseredy and MacLean assert that:

"...there is the potential for such research to be exploited by apologists for male violence. Without the context of the women's assaultive behaviour, the argument that women are just as violent as men, assumes that women and men assault each other for the same reasons and creates the impression that violence is gender-neutral (1990: 21)."

No other rigorous Canadian studies appear to have been done on female assaults in marital relationships; however, several U.S. inquiries have recently been conducted. They will receive brief attention here.

6. See Straus *et al.* (1981) for detailed descriptions of these findings.

Several studies show that female violence in conjugal settings, even with the intent to injure, is used primarily in self-defence (Berk *et al.*, 1983; Browne, 1987; Dobash and Dobash, 1988; Saunders, 1986, 1988, 1989).⁷ Nevertheless, some scholars question the validity of this research because it presents data collected from biased sources, such as police reports, prison samples, and other selected samples (Stets and Straus, 1990). Moreover, some researchers are once again arguing that domestic violence is a "two-way street" (McNeely and Robinson-Simpson, 1987). Straus (1989) attempts to resolve this debate on female violence by presenting findings from a 1985 National Family Violence Survey (Straus and Gelles, 1986).⁸ In this paper, he argues that his research "...casts doubt on the notion that assaults by women on their partners primarily are acts of self-defence or retaliation (1989: 9)." This study is, in the opinion of the author, misleading and methodologically problematic. Following is an examination of Straus' research techniques.

Based on his interpretation of female self-report data, Straus states that:

"Regardless of whether the analysis is based on all assaults or is focused on dangerous assaults, about as many women as men, according to their own report, attack a spouse who does not hit back. This casts doubt on the "self-defence" explanation for the high rate of domestic assault by women) (1989: 9)."

Does this finding negate the self-defence argument? The answer is no because Straus' data were gleaned from the CTS, an instrument well known for ignoring the contexts and motives of violence. The CTS, as discussed earlier, can measure only both the incidence and prevalence of violent and psychologically abusive acts. Since Straus cannot report the reasons for female abuse, his research does not discredit the contention that women hit male intimates to protect themselves.

In fairness to Straus, after presenting his erroneous assertion, he admits that his respondents may have acted in self-defence. Following this statement, he presents data derived from what he believes is a "more direct" measure of self-defence in martial relationships. Subjects were asked, "Let's talk about the last time you and your partner got into a physical fight... In that particular instance, who started the physical conflict,

you or your partner (1989: 9)." Of the 428 women who responded to this question, 52.7% said they hit first. Straus concludes that "These results do not support the hypothesis that assaults by women on their partners primarily are acts of self-defence or retaliation (1989: 11)."⁹

Unfortunately, the new measure does not achieve the goal Straus desires. Although he has made a step in the right direction by asking an initiation question, this technique does not focus specifically on the context and meaning of female violence against male partners. For example, no questions were asked about women's motives for striking first. As DeKeseredy (1992) and Schwartz and DeKeseredy (in press) point out, if Straus had asked women about their reasons for initiating attacks, he probably would have found that many women hit because of "well-founded fear" (Hamner and Saunders, 1984) of being beaten or raped by their husbands or cohabiting partners. Male physical and sexual violence against women is often preceded by name calling and other types of psychological abuse (Browne, 1987). Hence, these early warning signs prompt many women to hit first to deter their partners from hitting them (Saunders, 1989). Thus, most assaults initiated by women may actually be acts of self-defence.

An additional problem with Straus' analysis is that some respondents may have thought that the initiation measure asked who started the argument rather than who hit first (Saunders, 1989; Stets and Straus, 1990). Furthermore, Straus' question characterizes violence in domestic relationships as mutual combat (e.g., "Let's talk about the last time you and your partner got into a physical fight...") (Saunders, 1989). Hence, it may obscure the fact that most violence in domestic relationships involves men beating or raping their partners (Dobash *et al.*, 1992; Okun, 1986).

In summary, both of Straus' arguments are incorrect because of the problematic nature of his measures. Certainly, violence by women does occur, and is something to be dealt with before ours can be called a violence-free society. However, empirical evidence suggests that it is also a relatively minor problem.

Crime victimization surveys conducted in Canada, the United States and Britain consistently illustrate that wives are at much higher risk of spousal violence than are husbands. Methodological weaknesses of these surveys have resulted in serious, undercounting of interspousal violence; however, the percentage of women versus men victimized is in the expected direction (Dobash *et al.*, 1992). As Berk *et al.* note:

7. Makepeace's (1986) dating violence study also showed that women generally use violence to defend themselves from abusive men.

8. For more detailed information on the methods used in this study, see Gelles and Straus (1988), Stets and Straus (1990), and Straus and Gelles (1990).

9. These data and arguments are also found in a chapter written by Stets and Straus (1990).

"While there are certainly occasional instances of husbands being battered, it is downright pernicious to equate their experiences with those of the enormous number of women who are routinely and severely victimized (1983: 210)."

Straus and Gelles (1990) suggest that most researchers will not study battered husbands because they are afraid of sharp criticism (Schwartz and DeKeseredy, in press). Perhaps another explanation is that many researchers are better able to set priorities about what is important and what is relatively minor.

Future Canadian and U.S. research could make a significant contribution to resolving the female violence debate by conducting representative sample surveys that ask women directly about their motives for violence (e.g., why did you do it?). If this empirical objective is not met, erroneous arguments, such as those from Straus, may enhance the pain experienced by female victims of male abuse. Thus, the implications of his arguments for social policy need to be examined carefully.

Policy Implications

Discussions of a "battered husband syndrome" or even the argument of widespread female violence could be used by powerful interest groups to justify the denial of victim services, such as shelter houses (Schwartz and DeKeseredy, in press). For example, Steinmetz's (1977-78) incorrect assertion that husband beating is as prevalent as wife beating was used by Chicago state officials to block funding for a shelter for abused women and their children (Pleck *et al.*, 1977-78). Moreover, Straus and Gelles admit that their work has been used against battered women in court cases and to minimize the need for shelter houses, but they argue that not publicizing their data would be worse, since it would keep us from recognizing that "minor violence by wives greatly increases the risk of subsequent severe assault by the husband (1990: 120)."

Unfortunately, the problem is much worse than Straus and Gelles admit. Although they have the lofty goal of ending all violence by admitting all violence, according to Schwartz and DeKeseredy (in press), they are incorrect in asserting that not publicizing their data would be worse. Many agents of the criminal justice system, for example, and perhaps an even greater percentage of the general public, still continue to blame the female victims of violent crime for their own victimization. The argument that the problem of serious victimization of women is caused by females who practise minor victimization of men (Straus, 1989) feeds directly those juries and judges who continue to acquit

rapists and wife beaters because they believe that the victims provoked their assailants (Elias, 1986; Karman, 1990; Viano, 1983).

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1988 a jury found the husband of Judge Carol S. Irons guilty of only a lower manslaughter charge for killing his estranged wife in her courtroom. The jury found that breaking up with him provoked him to kill her. In New York City, Dong Lu Chen was sentenced in 1988 to probation for bludgeoning his wife to death with a hammer. After all, the judge reasoned, he was Chinese and she was unfaithful, so one can see that she provoked him into the act (Goodman, 1989). Numerous examples can be cited from all parts of North America. Straus and Gelles' argument is flawed due to their opinion that a major concern must be with women's low-level violence since it brings on high levels of men's violence. Rather than emphasizing that one is responsible for one's own acts even if provoked, this argument supports and encourages these sexist beliefs.

Research that holds women partially responsible for their own victimization extends well beyond the judiciary; male members of the general population are also affected. After abusing women, some men display contriteness and plea for forgiveness (Walker, 1977-78, 1983). These behaviours often stem from stress generated by beatings, sexual assault, or both (DeKeseredy, 1988). Nevertheless, male peers can alleviate or prevent post-abuse stress by providing a "vocabulary of adjustment" (Kanin, 1967). For example, male subcultures sometime designate certain women as deviant and thus legitimate targets of aggression. Examples of the labels imposed on women who violate male dating expectations are "teaser," "loose woman," "pick-up," and "economic exploiter" (Kanin, 1985). Justifications acquired from peers may enable abusers to continue viewing themselves as "normal" and "respectable" males. Similarly, Straus' research may buffer men from post-abuse stress by providing them with a vocabulary of adjustment (DeKeseredy, 1992).

Straus' argument that a woman uses violence as a defence against physical or sexual assault, providing her abusive partner with "a precedent and moral justification for him to hit her," (1989: 10) helps violent men to continue viewing their actions as normal and legitimate. In addition to acting as a buffering mechanism, Straus' discourse of legitimation may encourage men to continue to assert their authority through abusive means.

Sibling Abuse

If there is a dearth of reliable Canadian data on the context, meaning, and motive of female violence against men in conjugal settings, then the same thing can be said about sibling abuse, the most common and most overlooked form of family violence in the United States (Gelles and Straus, 1988). In fact, Straus and Gelles (1986) contend that children are the most violent members of all American families. Generally referred to by the general public as a "normal part of growing up" (Gelles and Straus, 1988), sibling violence is hardly a trivial issue. For example, in Straus *et al.*'s (1981) first National Family Violence Survey¹⁰:

"More than eight out of ten parents surveyed who had two or more children at home between the ages of three and seventeen said that there was one incident of sibling violence in the previous year. This translates into more than thirty-six million individual acts of sibling violence in the previous year (Gelles and Straus, 1988: 60)."

Most of the violent acts consisted of slaps, pushes, kicks, bites, and punches; however, it is estimated that three out of every one hundred used weapons to harm a sibling. Obviously, sibling violence needs to be taken much more seriously, especially in Canada where the "selective inattention" (Dexter, 1958) given to this problem is much more salient than it is in the United States.

Very little information on the sociodemographic correlates of sibling violence is currently available. The limited U.S. data show that girls are less violent than boys and that sibling violence decreases as children get older (Gelles and Cornell, 1985).

Parent Abuse

Many young people are not only violent toward their siblings, they also physically victimize their parents. Again, this is a problem that has been, by and large, ignored by Canadian researchers. Data from the Straus *et al.* (1981) national study show that roughly one in ten parents indicated being hit at least once by their children. Most of these acts consisted of biting and kicking; even so, three percent of the parents in the Straus *et al.* sample stated that they were victims of severe violence. In other words, 900 000 American parents may experience serious abuse each year (Gelles and Straus, 1988). The Straus *et al.* research was limited to acts completed by children between the ages of three and seventeen, and the annual incidence rates are presented in Table 1.¹¹

Table 1
Annual Incidence Rates for Parent Abuse and
Estimated Number of Cases Based on These Rates

	Rate per 1000 Children	Number Assaulted
A. Violence by Children Age 3-17		
Any violence against a parent	180	9 700 000
Severe violence against a parent	90	4 800 000
B. Violence by Children Age 15-17		
Any violence against a parent	100	1 100 000
Severe violence against a parent	35	400 000

Adult children also abuse their elderly parents. This problem will be examined in the next section.

Elder Abuse

In the Brillon report, the abuse of elderly family members refers to "...any act or intentional omission that causes old people suffering, serious psychological disturbance, undue violation of their rights and freedoms or any attack against their person or property (Brillon, 1987: 72)." How many elderly people are abused by their children in Canada? A major problem

10. Violence by children was not measured in the Second National Family Violence Survey.

11. This is a modified version of Table 6.1 found in the Straus and Gelles (1990) article.

with most Canadian research has been that relevant data are derived from health care professionals (Leroux and Petrunik, 1989). Such people can be considered unreliable sources of regional and national data on the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse because they are able to provide information only on events that come to their attention. Only representative sample surveys of victims, such as Podnieks' (1990) study can advance our knowledge of how many elderly parents are victimized in the population at large.

Podnieks used a telephone survey to collect national data from 2008 elderly people living in private dwellings. The prevalence of four types of abuse physical,¹² neglect, psychological, and financial exploitation were examined. However, only her physical abuse findings will be reported here because they are of central concern to Health Canada's Family Violence Prevention Division.

Podnieks found that 5 per 1000 elderly persons, or roughly 0.5 percent of her sample, are harmed by physical abuse. Although she asked respondents to report violent acts committed by their spouse, one co-resident child, and one member of their social network, she does not report variations in abuse perpetrated by members of these subgroups. Also, her findings do not include violent acts committed by children who live in separate residences. You do not have to live with someone in order to physically victimize them. Violence in dating relationships is a good example of this problem (DeKeseredy, 1988). Another major problem with Podnieks' research is that it excludes violent acts committed by more than one co-resident child.

In summary, although Podnieks' sampling procedures are superior to those used in other Canadian studies, her findings do not provide a reliable account of the prevalence of violence against elderly parents. If Canadian researchers do not develop more accurate measures of physical assaults, many battered elders will remain hidden "behind closed doors" (Straus *et al.*, 1981).

Parental Violence Toward Adolescents

Another type of family violence that appears to be hidden behind closed doors is adolescent abuse. The most recent U.S. national survey (Straus and Gelles, 1990) shows that approximately one out of three parents of a child 15 to 17 years of age stated that he or she physically attacked the child at least once during the year before the survey. Consistent with most forms of family violence, most of the acts were relatively minor (e.g., slapping). Nevertheless, many teenagers were seriously victimized. For example, 70 out of 1000 adolescents in the above age group were harmed by serious violence, and 21 per 1000 were seriously abused. Similar results are likely to be found in Canada.

12. A modified version of the *Conflict Tactics Scale* was used to measure physical abuse.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this report was to review briefly the North American sociological literature on the extent of four variants of family violence. The research reviewed here yields two major conclusions. First, there is a great need to develop better methods of discerning the context, meaning, and motive of all types of female violence in marital relationships. Many procedures used so far produce data conducive to inaccurate interpretations. These interpretations could be used to support social policies that threaten women's physical and psychological well-being.

The second (perhaps the most obvious) conclusion is that much more Canadian empirical work on the four topics examined in this report needs to be done. With the amount of attention Canada is now devoting to family violence, many victims may no longer remain hidden behind closed doors and have to "suffer in silence" (Pizzey, 1974). Below are several recommendations for further research.

First, to collect reliable data on the nature of female violence in marital relationships, researchers need to employ representative sample surveys which include measures that **directly** ask women to report their reasons for violent behaviour. No Canadian and U.S. national studies have yet addressed this concern (Saunders, 1989). Thus, in the two Canadian, nationwide studies currently being developed, the author recommends that two sets of identical questions about motivation created by Saunders be included in the CTS. The first set should follow the "minor" violence items and the other, the "severe violence" measures. Saunders' questions are:

1. What percent of these times (above) do you estimate that you acted in self-defence, that is, protected yourself from immediate physical harm?
2. What percent of these times were you trying to fight back?
3. What percent of these times did you assault your partner before he actually attacked you or threatened you with a weapon? (1988: 103)

The response categories to these questions are best articulated by Saunders when describing his measures:

"After each question there was a line with 0% and 100% at either end and percentage points spaced equally and numbered by 10's. Respondents were instructed to "Mark anywhere on the line." Note that respondents were not asked to divide 100% among the motivation items, but to assign a percent to each type of motivation (1988: 103)."

In addition to using the above measures of motivation, as Saunders correctly points out, researchers should use a version of the *Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale* (Crowne and Marlowe, 1964) to discern possible bias from respondents who attempt to provide socially desirable answers.

The second recommendation is that the CTS be modified so that it is not limited to measuring violent acts related to marital disputes. Many assaults come "out of the blue" (Browne, 1987), or are caused by extra-marital factors (e.g., job stress, drug abuse). Perhaps the following introduction would be an improvement: "I'm going to read a list of some things that you and your partner might have done to each other, and would first like you to tell me for each one how often you did it in the past year." The use of this technique will probably elicit many more reports of violence against wives and thus help resolve the debate on female violence. Even so, the only way to prove conclusively that this preamble will elicit higher incidence and prevalence rates is to actually use it. It may also be effective in national research into the causes of female violence in dating relationships. Therefore, the above introduction is seriously being considered by the author of this report and his co-researcher, Katharine Kelly.

Third, to gather reliable data on the extent, distribution, and causes of sibling abuse, national, regional, and city-wide representative sample survey research needs to be done. Perhaps the empirical methods used in the first U.S. national family violence survey (Straus *et al.*, 1981) should be considered in the Canadian context. Some of these research techniques could also be effective and reliable ways of gathering quantitative data on various forms of parent abuse. Moreover, Pillemer and Finkelhor's (1988) methodology could help Canadian researchers to collect statistical information on one major variant of child-to-parent violence elder abuse. These people are generally referred to as the authors of the most reliable study on the incidence of elder abuse.

A fourth suggestion for further research is the use of qualitative methods. Most family violence surveys rely on closed questions, such as those in the CTS, to collect data on abusive conduct. Although these measures can provide reliable information, alternative techniques, such as open questions, have a "decided advantage" because they enhance interviewer-respondent rapport, allow respondents to qualify their responses, encourage interaction and collaboration between researcher and subject, and elicit versions of violent events that reflect the lived experiences of victims (Smith, 1991).

Finally, as Smith (1991) correctly points out, it is important to use multiple measures of violence. In other words, respondents should be asked more than once about their violent experiences. Often, subjects do not report events because of embarrassment, fear of reprisal, and memory error (Kennedy and Dutton, 1987; Smith, 1987). Some people even consider some abusive acts as too trivial or inconsequential to mention (Straus *et al.*, 1981). Researchers may be able to minimize this problem by asking respondents supplementary questions about violent events toward the end of an interview.

For example, Smith's (1987) woman abuse study shows that some silent or forgetful victims (N = 60) changed their answers when asked again later in the interview. Belated responses increased the abuse prevalence rate by approximately 10%. In addition, 21 belated disclosures increased the severe abuse prevalence rate.

Similarly, at the end of their questionnaires, researchers interested in the problems discussed in this report should include the following revised rendition of a question used in Smith's inquiry:

"I really appreciate the time you have taken to complete this survey. All the information I've gathered will remain strictly confidential. I realize that this topic is very sensitive and that you may be reluctant to reveal your experiences. But I'm also a bit worried that I haven't asked the right questions. So now that you have had a chance to think about the topic, have you had any (any other) in which you were physically harmed by a family member (1987: 180)."

Supplementary questions may also provide more accurate information on the severity of violence against family members. For example, the most common measure of family violence – the CTS – ignores that some "minor" forms of violence are extremely injurious and should be coded as serious (Smith, 1987). If a respondent reports slapping his or her partner, the

incident is usually labelled minor violence. However, a slap can draw blood or possibly break teeth (Smith, 1986). If so, it should be coded as severe violence.

Smith (1987) labelled behaviours severe if answers to supplementary questions matched items in the CTS severe violence subscale. Four minor violence disclosures were recoded as severe because of victims' detailed descriptions of events and their consequences.

It should also be noted that the CTS misses various kinds of violence, such as burning, suffocating, squeezing, and scratching (Smith, 1987) as well as sexual assault. Additional questions may elicit reports of these behaviours and thus provide more accurate data on the types of violence addressed in this report.

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